

TO: Board of County Commissioners:

We are now in a difficult economic situation, with little direction of what must be done and with great uncertainty about when things might reverse. Are we all aware of what is happening right here in Ravalli County? Businesses are failing, especially those that have to do with the growth industries. Jobs are gone, loans have dried up, and personal and family difficulties are increasing. I used to hear that the only way we can stop uncontrolled growth in the valley would be to put gates at either end. Well the economic situation has in effect done exactly that. They just aren't coming. For some it may be heresy to say that we should readjust our thinking about our local economy and take positive steps to promote a turnaround and get things moving again.

Is there a role that the planning department and the planning board might play in reacting to this economic crisis, which is mostly not of our own making? Let me read the planning board's Purpose. "The purpose of the Planning Board is to improve the present health, safety, convenience, and welfare of current residents and to plan for the future development of the county" (MCA 76-1-102). The planning board has a community responsibility. What can we do?

I think the planning board should take a role in whatever plans the commissioners may have in discussing use of federal funds through the state that the county will receive. My suggestion is that the commissioners should form a task force with wide representation and with the charge of recommending specific projects to be supported by the "economic stimulus" funds. Proposed projects must recognize the importance of protecting the natural environment, including clean water and air, improving transportation and in general to plan for reasonable future development of the county. This is an opportune time for long range planning as we strive to reverse this economic crisis.

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